

INTRODUCTION

This document is a draft resource management plan/environmental impact statement (RMP/EIS). The environmental impact statement consists of the information discussing the four alternatives throughout this draft. This document has been prepared in accordance with the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) planning regulations in the Code of Federal Regulations and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

The information contained in this document reflects current policy and regulatory information as of January 31, 1987. Policy or regulatory changes after this date will be reflected in the final RMP/EIS. Policy or regulatory changes after the RMP is finalized will be incorporated through plan maintenance, unless they reflect a change in management direction. In that instance the RMP will be amended or a new RMP written.

LOCATION OF THE PLANNING AREA

The West HiLine Planning Area (see Fig. 1.1) includes the entire Havre Resource Area (Hill and Blaine Counties and that portion of Chouteau County north of the Missouri River) and that portion of the Great Falls Resource Area located in Glacier, Toole and Liberty Counties. Small portions of the Judith Resource Area in Fergus County and the Phillips Resource Area in Phillips County were included in this project when management of the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River (UMNWSR) Corridor, and its related lands became an issue in this RMP.

The planning area is located in the north central portion of Montana. It is bounded on the north by Canada, on the east by the Phillips Resource Area, on the south by the Judith Resource Area and to the west by Glacier National Park.

The planning area encompasses 11,285,024 acres, of which 626,098 surface acres (5.5%) and 1,328,014 subsurface acres are administered by the BLM. The majority of landownership is private. Other significant landownerships include the Blackfeet, Rocky Boys and Fort Belknap Indian Reservations, small portions of Glacier National Park, and the Lewis and Clark National Forest, and some state lands. Table 1.1 portrays the ownership by resource area within the planning area.

This plan only covers the management of public lands administered by the BLM. It does not affect private lands or lands administered by other federal agencies, within the planning area.



TABLE 1.1
OWNERSHIP BY RESOURCE AREA IN THE PLANNING AREA¹

RESOURCE AREAS	SURFACE						SUBSURFACE	
	BLM	Private	State	Native American Lands	Other Federal	Total Surface	BLM	Other
Great Falls	37,334	2,057,332	294,772	1,313,563	439,452	4,142,453	178,658	3,963,795
Havre	541,573	5,217,867	597,000	632,000	85,000	7,073,440	1,111,952	5,961,488
Judith ²	42,588	15,155	6,475	0	0	64,218	32,770	31,448
Phillips ²	4,603	224	87	0	0	4,914	4,634	280
TOTAL	626,098	7,290,578	898,334	1,945,563	524,452	11,285,025	1,328,014	9,957,011

¹ Montana Department of State Lands, 1984
BLM Public Lands Digest Montana, 1984

² These acreage figures are for lands important to river management only.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The West HiLine RMP will provide a master plan for managing and allocating public land resources within the planning area over the next 10 to 15 years. This RMP also resolves several resource issues. It identifies lands for retention, acquisition and disposal; identifies areas as open, limited or closed to off-road vehicle (ORV) use; identifies areas not suitable for transmission lines and communication site right-of-way location; identifies areas where management emphasis may be required; and determines management direction for the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Corridor.

Management guidance for other resources in the planning area is found in the Management Common to All Alternatives section of Chapter 2 in this document. This guidance was carried forward from five management framework plans and five major environmental documents prepared in the 1970s and 1980s. The guidance given in that section will be followed no matter which alternative is selected and is a substantial portion of this RMP.

When finalized, this RMP will supersede all previous planning efforts. It will also consolidate all major land use decisions for BLM administered lands in the planning area into one document.

ISSUES

At the beginning of the planning process, the BLM, general public, other federal agencies and state and local governments identified the following issues and management concerns for the planning area.

Land Tenure Adjustment

The BLM manages a variety of public lands in the West HiLine Area, including public domain (lands which have never left federal ownership), land utilization (lands which left federal ownership and were later acquired under the Bankhead-Jones Act), and mineral estate (subsurface) lands. Many of these lands are widely scattered and often pose multiple resource management problems. This document will identify which lands should be retained, acquisition areas and lands which may leave federal ownership.

Off-Road Vehicle Management

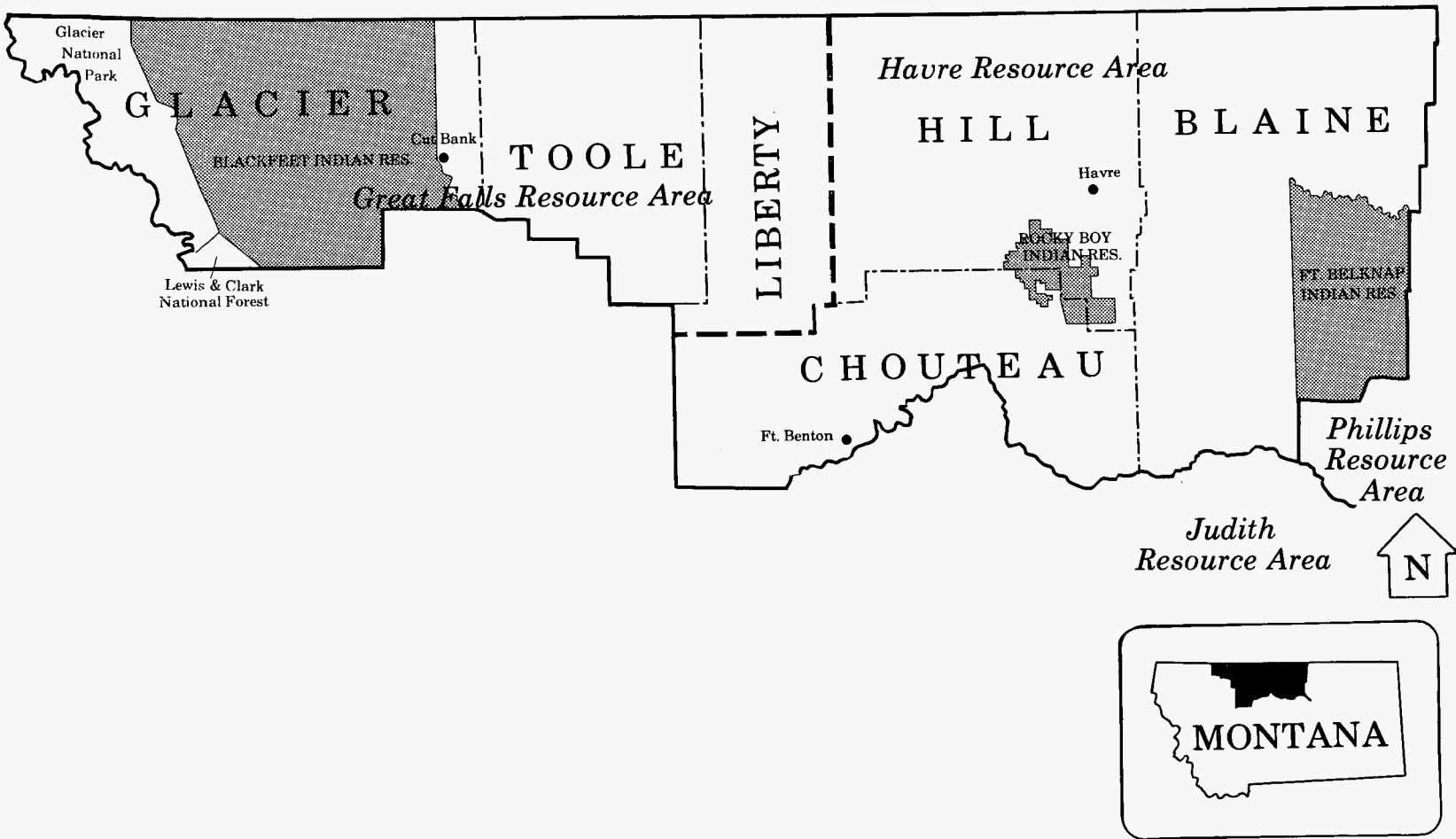
Off-road vehicle use is increasing throughout the planning area and access roads are extending into previously unroaded areas. Executive Order (EO) 11644 as amended by EO 11989, directs that all public lands be designated as open, limited or closed to off-road vehicle use. This project will identify those designations within the planning area.

Right-of-Way Location

This project will identify public lands for avoidance and exclusion areas for transmission line rights-of-way location. These facilities, regardless of size, transport a commodity.

The BLM will also identify areas which are not suitable for communication site location.

Figure 1.1 Location Map of the West HiLine Resource Management Area.



Emphasis Areas

Three areas in the Great Falls and Havre Resource Areas were identified during the scoping process as emphasis areas; that is areas which may need management emphasis to protect or preserve particular resources. Figure 1.2 is a location map of these areas.

The Kevin Rim has high potential as a peregrine falcon reintroduction area. It is currently a high use area for a variety of raptors and also contains portions of the oldest active oil and gas field in Montana.

The Sweet Grass Hills are significant because of their importance as a religious and cultural use area for Native Americans; because they are an historical hard rock mining area; because they contain high value recreation lands; and because they support diverse wildlife populations.

The Cow Creek area contains the Nez Perce National Historic Trail, the Cow Island Trail, portions of the Cow Creek Wilderness Study Area (WSA), the UMNWSR, and the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail.

Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Management

The Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River was designated in 1976, because of its high value recreational, historical, cultural, wildlife, mineral, geologic, range and unique natural resources. This area is also considered a premier segment of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, which was designated in 1978. This plan will address future development of recreation resources and protection or development of cultural and historical resources on approximately 88,153 acres along the UMNWSR.

ISSUES NOT ADDRESSED

Numerous concerns were identified during the scoping process that could not be appropriately addressed in this RMP. The disposal of produced water from oil and gas production; the development of water resources in the Milk River Valley; the Milk River water diversion proposal by the Bureau of Reclamation; the management of range resources on Bureau of Reclamation lands; and the cleanup of the Kevin Sunburst oil field are examples of issues that can't be resolved in an RMP. The guidance for the majority of these issues is contained in various memorandums of understanding among the BLM, the Bureau of Reclamation and the state of Montana.

Access to public lands has been addressed, to the extent possible, with existing information. Access needs have been addressed in general terms and for geographic areas rather than for specific needs and routes. The Lewistown District is committed to completing an access inventory that will, with public involvement, allow BLM to address the specific access needs for the West HiLine Planning Area. Information on specific routes and acquisition needs will be presented in an access activity plan in several years.

Coal development is not addressed in this RMP because the planning area is not in a coal production area and no federal coal leasing will result from this plan. In addition, major coal and mineral operators and organizations were contacted to determine interest in the coal reserves in the planning area, and there was no apparent interest in these

reserves. Any potential federal coal leasing would be guided by the federal coal management regulations (43 CFR 3425). Any future application for a coal lease would be studied for acceptability utilizing these four planning screens: (1) verification of coal development potential; (2) application of the 20 unsuitability criteria; (3) surface owner consultation (for split estate lands); and (4) multiple use trade-offs involving other resource values compared to coal. For underground coal mine development, the surface owner consent screen is not applicable. Unsuitability criteria will be applied to surface facilities that are associated with underground mining.

Application of these screens would constitute an amendment to this RMP and would be subject to Gubernatorial and public review. If some areas would be found acceptable for consideration for leasing, the applicant maintains interest, and evidence of surface owner consent is provided, these lands could be offered for competitive lease by the Secretary of the Interior.

ISSUES PREVIOUSLY ADDRESSED

Concerns about grazing management, riparian management, wilderness management and oil and gas management were all identified during the scoping process. However, these resource issues have been addressed in previous planning efforts and are further addressed in the Management Common to All Alternatives section of Chapter 2.

PLANNING CRITERIA

Planning criteria may be legal, policy, or regulatory constraints that direct or limit BLM's ability to resolve issues, or they may respond to public input or coordination efforts with state or local governments and other federal agencies. General criteria were developed to guide the RMP/EIS. Criteria specific to each issue were then developed to guide the formulation of alternatives and selection of the preferred alternative.

General Criteria

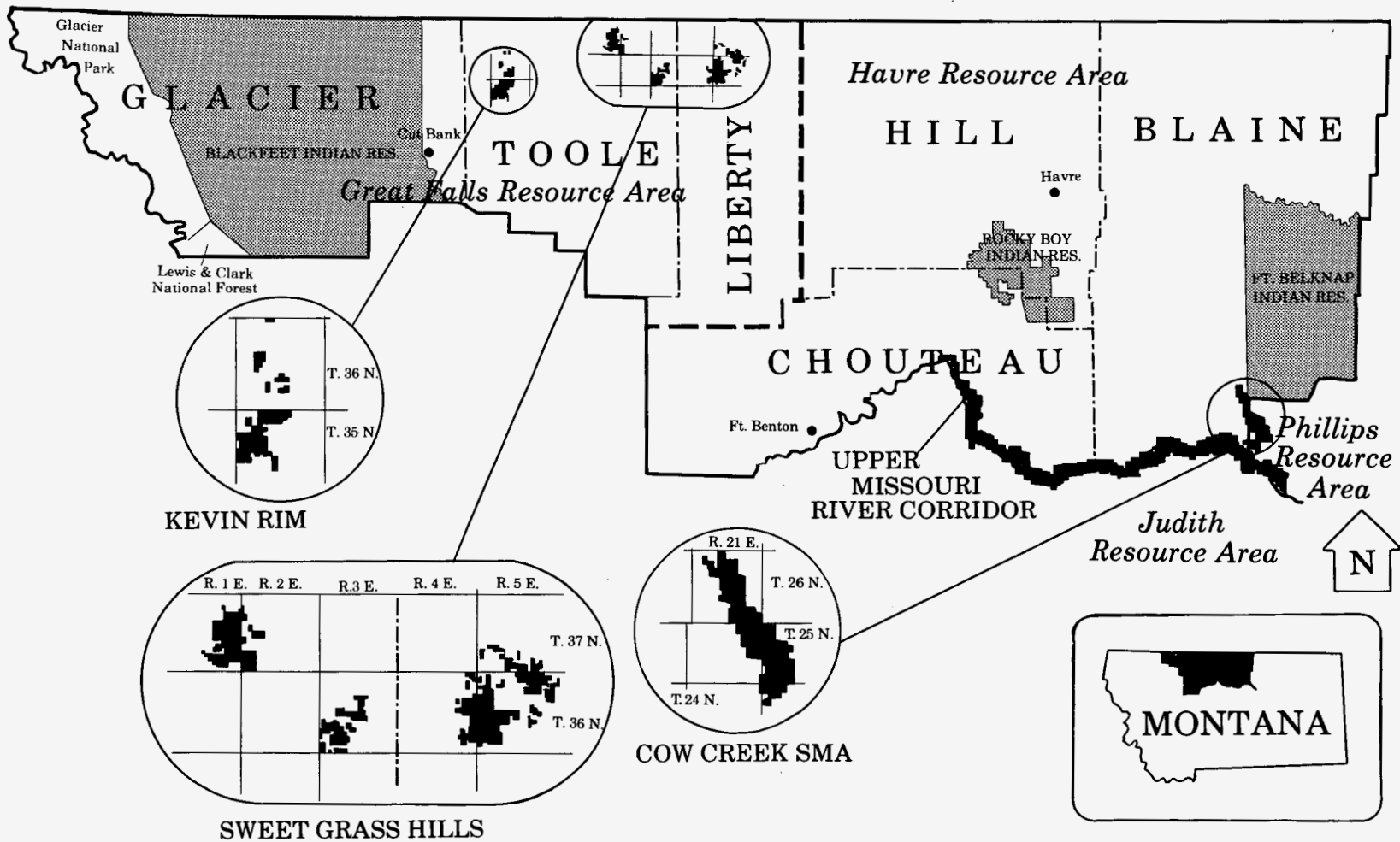
This plan will provide BLM with broad resource management guidelines to implement a variety of activity plans to meet the planning objectives in all programs. Specific guidance will only be used to resolve major management conflicts.

The BLM will adhere to the guidance for all programs provided by BLM's Washington Office Supplemental Guidance for RMPs (1986) and the State Director's Guidance for RMPs (1983/1984).

Valid decisions from existing documents will be carried forward in the Management Common To All Alternatives section of Chapter 2.

The RMP alternatives will be developed on a planning area wide basis. Alternatives for resource protection and development will only analyze those issues requiring management resolution. The RMP/EIS and supporting documents will incorporate all available valid decisions, analysis and information.

Figure 1.2 Location Map of the Emphasis Areas and the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Corridor.



The RMP will apply mitigating measures or stipulations only to resolve existing or projected management conflicts. Again, most of these will be standard operating procedures and will be identified in the Management Common to All Alternatives section of Chapter 2.

Any decision or mitigative measure required by the RMP will be enforceable and lend itself to monitoring.

To the extent possible, the plan will dovetail with local, county, state and other federal agency plans. We will rely on our counterparts in other agencies, to the maximum extent possible, for assistance in determining consistency with their plans. This assistance will be accomplished through the review process.

The RMP will be used as the basic planning document to guide our management and budget requests for the planning area over the next 10-15 years. Revisions will be made as necessary. The final RMP will be divided to address two planning units. One planning unit is the entire Havre Resource Area (which for now will include the management guidance for the UMNWSR). The decisions affecting the UMNWSR will later be incorporated into the Judith and Phillips RMPs when those documents are prepared. The other planning unit is the northern portion of the Great Falls Resource Area. The Great Falls section will incorporate pertinent decisions from the Headwaters RMP, thus providing the Great Falls Resource Area with one RMP.

The alternatives chosen for study will be economically and socially feasible and acceptable.

The RMP will develop criteria by which lands placed under BLM management in the future, either through withdrawal revocation, exchange or purchase, will be evaluated and brought under multiple use management.

Issue Specific Criteria

Issue No. 1: Land Tenure Adjustment

Lands which meet the criteria listed in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (PL 94-759, FLPMA Sec. 203(a), Sec. 206(a) and the Recreation and Public Purposes Act would be available for disposal through exchange, sale or sale under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act.

The State Director's Guidance for RMPs will be applied to help determine which lands meet the disposal criteria. Appendix 1.1 details the State Director's Guidance, lists the land adjustment criteria for the Havre and Great Falls Resource Areas and gives the legal description for adjustment and disposal lands. The land adjustment criteria was derived from State Director's Guidance on Land Pattern Review and Land Adjustment (USDI-BLM 1984) and further refined to suit the needs of each resource area.

Public lands which have important resource features would normally be retained unless exchanged for lands with equal or greater values.

Economic and social conditions created by land adjustment will be considered.

Issue No. 2: Off-Road Vehicle Management

Areas within the planning area will be identified as open, closed, or limited for off-road vehicle use.

Public interest and/or demand for off-road vehicle use areas will be used to determine the need for restrictions under a limited designation. These restrictions will be

needed to minimize: damage to soils, watershed, and vegetation; harassment of wildlife; impacts to WSAs; destruction of historic and archaeological sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places and those sites with the potential to be listed; and visual intrusions.

Limited or closed designations will be used to avoid public hazard areas (i.e., sour gas fields, old mine areas).

Use area designations (open and limited) will minimize conflicts with other programs and resource plans.

Issue No. 3: Right-of-Way Location

An area will remain open to lineal and communication site right-of-way location unless restrictions are needed to: minimize adverse impacts to soil, watershed and vegetation; minimize adverse impacts to high value wildlife habitat; minimize visual intrusions to the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Corridor; avoid impacts to WSAs; and to avoid destruction of historic and archaeological sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places and sites with potential for listing.

All future transmission line sitings will consider the Montana Interagency Agreement for right-of-way siting and the Department of National Resources and Conservation siting rules. Future sitings will also consider existing corridors.

Issue No. 4: Emphasis Areas

All high resource values including, but not limited to, wildlife, cultural, mineral and recreational resources will be identified.

Resource conflicts will be identified in emphasis areas.

Public needs and demands for the resources present will be considered, including but not limited to, existing mining claims and mineral leases.

Impacts to all resources will be identified when one resource takes precedence in the emphasis areas. The decision will strive to balance resource use while ensuring the protection and preservation of the significant and relevant resources present.

Issue No. 5: Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River Management

Management actions will maintain consistency with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (PL 90-542 1968) and its amendment for the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River (PL 94-486, 1976).

Management direction will provide for utilization of recreation resources.

Resource conflicts will be identified and resolved in the alternatives.

Direction will be established to provide for visitor services through a blend of private and public initiatives within the constraints of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and the Memorandum of Understanding with the National Park Service.

Management will continue the segregation of locatable minerals within the wild segments of the UMNWSR Corridor. In addition, BLM will not lease minerals within the corridor until rules are made known by the Secretary of the Interior.